

Inservicing Teachers On Their Role In Crisis Response

Presented by
Cheri Lovre, M.S.



PO Box 331 • Salem, OR 97302
(503) 585-3484 • fax (503) 364-0403
cmi@cmionline.org • www.cmionline.org

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on school crisis response training and resources.*



A Philosophical "Set"

- Reinforce that this is about "working smarter, not harder"
- Teachers don't have to become "instant counselors"
- This will help them both professionally and personally
- These skills and concepts apply both to school-wide tragedies and for working with the one student who loses a parent or sibling.

Teachable moments

- Many opportunities every year
- National and local events
- Value of grief as a concept prior to an experience

Value in acceptance, compassion, school climate

- Teaches empathy as an every-day value
- Language and concepts integrated into conversations
- Concern for others = kids tell what they know
- Lessons and attitudes begin to transfer over to anti-bullying concepts
- Teaching teachers language and concepts takes it directly to the students
- Moves beyond a "program" to attitudes

Tasks of grief as a basis (Dr. Alan Wolfelt):

- To hear the truth
- To put our own words to the reality
- To share memories with others
- To give the death meaning
- To examine identity
- To have a memorial/ritual of passage
- Continued support

Activities and discussions

- Look for assisting in task mastery
- Does this help kids understand the truth?
- Am I giving them time to use their own words?
- Time for them to share memories?
- Quiet time for reflection (identity)

Role of ritual

- Provides a turning point
- Allows making of amends
- Does not have to be complex or sophisticated
- Teaches how to create ritual for future

Examples

- Rose bud for permanent substitute
- Letters burned following a suicide
- Roses at graduation
- Swing seat with stickers



Teacher reluctance:

- Weren't trained for it - might lose composure
- No language or conceptual foundation
- Fears that parents will object
- Some of the incidents are complex, fear-invoking
- Concepts above the developmental stage of students

Basics:

- You don't have to be a counselor
- You can't take away their pain
- Avoiding it gives kids the message they're on their own
- Kids are seldom reluctant to talk about it
- May not have words and concepts
- May have fears, anxieties they're hiding
- Often feel relief that someone brings it up

Anatomy of a discussion:

State the obvious

- Let's kids know you're tuned in
- Validates their perceptions
- Gives concrete information
- Doesn't make a judgment
- What a video camera would validate
- "This is the first time some of you have known someone who died. When that happens the first time, we have a variety of kinds of thoughts and feelings that come up. Some might be really sad and some might be fearful. There are lots of others, too."
- "This might be the first time you've had a classmate who had a parent die."

Give some examples

- "Sometimes when we lose someone to death we begin to have fears that more people we love will die."
- "Sometimes when we first understand what suicide is, we wonder who else might think about that."
- "Sometimes when a friend loses a parent, we don't know whether to bring it up or never talk about it."

Ask questions

- "How many of you had already heard about this? What did you hear?"
- "How many of you have lost someone in your family? What things did anyone do that helped your family?"
- "What are things that we can think of to help John when he comes back?"

Invite other concerns

- "What do you think worries kids at this point?"
- "Are there other things that are bothering you?"
- "What could I do that would help?"



And always, my favorite:

- "What do you wish adults understood about how it is to be a kid today?"

Teachers' role:

- May read announcement of the death to students
- Lead discussion with students
- May lead activity of some sort
- Return to academics when majority is ready
- Do not gate-keep for the Safe Room
- Come to before- and after-school meeting
- Identify and refer kids w/ extreme reactions

Easy activities to move kids further into discussion:

Elementary students:

- Socio-grams of "When I'm really worried about something, here are the people I most want to tell... here are the next ones out from that..."
- Draw a cemetery and make up a story about a couple of the people who died. How old were they? How did they die? Who misses them?
- Lifelines -- each child draws a long line on a long piece of paper and writes or draws in the things that have happened to them from birth till now. "Who else has something on their lifeline like something you have?"

Middle and high school:

- Write a letter of regret and appreciation
- Write your own obituary
- Break them into small groups and give questions:
- If you lost a parent, would you want your friends to bring it up when you came back? Only close friends? Most of your friends?
- What are three things you can do to show someone that you care?
- When did you first realize that everyone would die some day?

Remind teachers

- About suicide: take all threats seriously
- Just BEing there is the most important thing
- They already do so much of this naturally -- we're just adding concepts and language to take it deeper
- When a child loses a parent, often they don't "hit bottom" in terms of the struggle for several months. The second year may be worse than the first.
- Don't let go of discipline, but use a gentle touch.
- Remind teachers that their students are lucky to have them
- They're only as good for their kids as they are good to themselves -- **practice good self-care! Always!**

notes:

